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THE SOLDIER'S FRIEND;

OR,

CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

LATE PRETENDED AUGMENTATION

OF THE

SUBSISTENCE

OF THE

PRIVATE SOLDIERS.

"*Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law.*"

GOLDSMITH.

Written by a SUBALTERN.

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1793.

Soldiers Friend

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THE

SOLDIER's FRIEND.

AMONGST the many curious manœuvres of the preſent Adminiſtration, I do not recollect one that marks more ſtrongly its character than the late alteration in the pay and eſtabliſhment of the Army. The augmentation (as they would inſinuate it is) of the pay of the Private Soldiers, is repreſented as ariſing from a conſideration of the wretchedneſs of their ſituation; and the pretended reduction of the foot forces is held out to the Public as an act of œconomy. The People, I am much afraid, are ſatisfied with this: I ſay, I am afraid of it, for I ſhall always be ſorry to ſee them ſatisfied with any thing ſhort of truth. The ſituation of the Privates in our marching regiments of foot was really ſo miſerable, that every one, endued with the leaſt compaſſion, muſt rejoice to find that a *morſel of bread* has been, by any means, added to their ſcanty meal; and the enormous load of taxes, that preſs out the very vitals of the people, enſures a favourable reception to every reduction, or pretended re-

duction, of public expence, let it be ever ſo trifling or abſurd. If we add to theſe conſiderations the little knowledge that the People in general have of military affairs, we ſhall not be ſupriſed to find them ſatisfied with the plauſible deluſions held out to them on this occaſion. But it certainly becomes us to look a little deeper into things, and not to truſt men on their bare words, whoſe buſineſs (I might have ſaid *trade*) it is to deceive us.

I propoſe to make a few obſervations on the alteration that has taken place in the Soldiers's pay; in doing which although I ſhall be very conciſe, I have the vanity to think, I ſhall diſcover a little better information on the ſubject than the Secretary at War did at his opening of it in the Houſe of Commons; when he obſerved (after having ſtated the ſaving that would ariſe from the reduction in the infantry) that "againſt "this ſaving he had to mention an increaſe that had "been made to the pay of the Private Soldiers, to the "amount of 23,000l. The ſituation of the Privates "had long been admitted to have been extremely hard. "It had *in former years* been a regulation, that a "Soldier ſhould receive three ſhillings a week for his "ſubſiſtence. It has *of late years ſo happened*, that he "had not had for that purpoſe above eighteen pence or "two ſhillings. This was evidently too little for the "bare purpoſe of exiſtence. By the late regulation, "his pay was to be made adequate to the ſubſiſtence the "common Soldier *formerly enjoyed*, an object which "he was confident would meet with the warm appro-"bation of every man."

Upon hearing this, one might with great propriety have

have cried out in the language of the *Clown* to *Malvolio* —"are yo not mad indeed, or do you but counterfeit?" If any thing done in that wiſe and equal Repreſentation of the People, called the Houſe of Commons, were worth a thought from a man of ſenſe; if any weakneſs or abſurdity of theirs could at this day poſſibly create the leaſt aſtoniſhment, one might think it wonderful, that Members ſhould ſit, and ſilently hear their underſtandings thus inſulted, and ſee their acts as it were trampled under foot before their faces! But let us leave the ſentiments and deciſions of this *virtuous* aſſembly to thoſe who have the management of them, and form a judgment for ourſelves.

As the Secretary obſerved, "the ſituation of the "Privates had long been admitted to have been ex-"tremely hard;" but people had not the leaſt notion that "*it had ſo happened* of late years, that the Soldier "had only *eighteen pence* or *two ſhillings* a week for "his ſubſiſtence." Men of humanity thought the Soldier's ſituation hard, but every one thought that he received *three ſhillings a week* for his ſubſiſtence; and why any man unacquainted with the abuſes of the Army ſhould think otherwiſe I cannot imagine, ſeeing that there is an act of Parliament, a law of the land, that declares it ſhall be ſo. "It was *formerly* a regulation, "that a Soldier ſhould receive three ſhillings a week for "his ſubſiſtence." Why formerly? Has it not been a regulation, a law of the land, for theſe fifty or a hundred years, and does it not continue ſo to this moment? Was it not enacted, no longer ago than laſt year, by the very Parliament to whom this impudent abſurdity was delivered,—"That, if any Officers

" having received their Soldiers' pay, ſhall refuſe to " pay each reſpective non-commiſſioned Officer and " Soldier their reſpective pay, when it ſhall become " due, at the rate of ſix ſhillings *per* week for each " Serjeant, four ſhillings and ſixpence *per* week for " each Corporal and Drummer, and *three ſhillings per* " *week for each Soldier* of any marching regiment of " foot or independent company;—and at the end of " every two months to account for one ſhilling *per* " week to each Serjeant, two pence *per* week to each " Corporal and Drummer, and ſixpence *per* week to " each Foot Soldier;—the ſaid one ſhilling *per* week, " two pence *per* week, and ſix-pence *per* week, being " the remainder of the ſubſiſtence of each Serjeant, " Corporal, Drummer and Foot Soldier; then upon " proof threreof, before a Court-martial as aforeſaid to " be for that purpoſe held and ſummoned by his Ma- " jeſty's order, every ſuch Officer ſo offending ſhall " be diſcharged from his employment, and ſhall forfeit " to the informer, upon conviction before the ſaid Court- " martial, one hundred pounds to be levied as aforeſaid; " and the informer, if a Soldier (if he demands it) " ſhall be, and he is hereby diſcharged from all further " ſervice; any thing in this act contained to the con- " trary notwithſtanding." This clauſe is to be found in every *Mutiny Bill* that ever was framed in this kingdom: it is not only *a law*, but it is a law that is renewed every year, and therefore muſt be underſtood by every Member of Parliament. Yet, notwithſtanding this law, which ſo poſitively declares that the Foot Soldier ſhall receive three ſhilling *per* week ſubſiſtence, it has " ſo happened of late years that he has had only " eighteen pence or two ſhillings!" It has " *ſo happened*!" and for years too! aſtoniſhing! It has " ſo happened,"

happened" that an act of Parliament has been moſt notoriouſly and ſhamefully diſobeyed for years, to the extreme miſery of thouſands of deluded wretches (our countrymen), and to the great deteriment of the nation at large; it has "ſo happened," that not one of the offenders have been brought to juſtice for this diſobedience, even now it is fully diſcovered; and it has "ſo happened," that the hand of power has made another dive into the national purſe, in order—not to add to what the Soldier ought to have received; not to ſatisfy *his* hunger and thirſt; but to gratify the whim or the avarice of his capricious and plundering ſuperiors.

But *how* has this "happened?" The Secretary did not think proper to explain this; perhaps he could not, for the ſecrets of the Army are ſomething like thoſe of Free Maſonry; it is obſolutely neceſſary to become a brother of the blade before you can become at all acquainted with the *arcana* of the profeſſion. The Secretary therefore (though I cannot help looking upon him as a ſort of *retainer to the ſervice*) may be ſuppoſed to be unqualified for this explanation; or he might think the ſublime myſteries of the Army a ſubject of too high and too delicate a nature to be diſcuſſed by the Aſſembly to which he was ſpeaking; or he might (which is, indeed, the moſt probable reaſon for his ſilence) look upon any explanation as ſo much time loſt; his *buſineſs* being only to aſk for money, and there's, in reality, being only to give. And here I cannot help obſerving, that this Aſſembly ſeems by none of its acts to be more worthy of the attribute of *omnipotence*, ſo often beſtowed on it, than by its donations, for how exactly does the manner of thoſe correſpond with that

promiſe in Scripture—" aſk, and it ſhall be given unto you? Their conduct in this particular bears an exact reſemblance to that of the Father of the Univerſe, with this little difference, the diſpenſation of His gifts is the reſult of infinite wiſdom, and the cauſe of univerſal order and happineſs;—while theirs * I might have obſerved alſo, that the gifts of the God of Truth are (if I may be allowed the expreſſion) his own property beſtowed on others; whereas the largeſſes of this Aſſembly may be ſaid, in many caſes, to be the property of others beſtowed, &c. &c.—But to return to the ſubject, though the Secretary at War had his reaſons for not entering into an explanation of this ſecret, I have none, and therefore I ſhall do it immediately.

We have ſeen that the Private Soldier ought always to have received three ſhillings a week for his ſubſiſtence, and that only ſixpence a week ought to have been retained as arrears. This ſixpence a week was intended to furniſh him with *neceſſaries*; that is to ſay, with ſhirts, ſhoes, and ſtockings, as he might want over and above the complete dreſs ſupplied him annually. This *was*, and this *is* the law of this land; but it has "ſo "happened," that the commanding Officers of regiments have, "of late years," been above the law; and they have therefore thought proper to pay the Soldier only "eighteen pence or two ſhillings a week:" and though "this is evidently too little for the bare purpoſe "of exiſtence," the poor wretch has been obliged to ſubſiſt on it; unleſs when hunger has driven him to plunder

plunder the people whom he was paid to defend. But if the Soldier had only eighteen pence or two ſhillings a week for his ſubſiſtence, what became of the reſt?—In the firſt place, a ſhilling a week was retained as arrears in room of ſixpence; and, before we go any further, let us ſee how this ſhilling a week was diſpoſed off. The ſixpence a week, I will maintain, was quite ſufficient to ſupply a Private Soldier with every thing *neceſſary* for his wear, if he were beſides regularly provided with a complete dreſs annually, which always was, or, at leaſt, always ought to have been the caſe. But it has "ſo happened of late years," that the Officers, to whoſe wiſdom and honour the intereſt of one faction or another has committed the care of our Soldiers, have not been content with their men dreſſing according to their rank and ability; they have obliged them to purchaſe articles of dreſs unheard of in former Armies, all of them far too expenſive, and moſt of them totally uſeleſs. It may ſeem difficult to account for a conduct like this; why ſhould Officers take a delight in extorting the poor wretches' pay from them with no other view than that of merely fooling it away. To give them their due, this was not the caſe. The world is often deceived in thoſe jovial, honeſt looking fellows, the Officers of the Army: I have known very few of them but perfectly well knew how to take care of themſelves either in peace or war; and I could mention characters in in this *honourable* profeſſion that would ſhine amongſt *the Seed of Abraham*, or do honour to the ſociety of Stock Jobbers. Their induſtry and care is in nothing more conſpicuous then in the management of the above mentioned ſhilling a week, the arrears of the Private

Soldier

Soldier. Every one, who is in the leaſt acquainted with the Army, knows that the expenditure of the Soldier's arrears is not left to himſelf; he has no choice when, or in what manner it ſhall be laid out; indeed, it is a matter that his Officer ſaves him the trouble of thinking about, by laying it all out—not for the Soldier's benefit, but for his own. This he thus manages: A little while before the time arrives when he is to account to the Soldier for his arrears, he makes up his account ſo far as to be able to ſee what credit the man will have; then he purchaſes ſomething or other, no matter what, gives it the man, who brings his account to a balance. I have, indeed, heard of ſome tender conſcienced Officers, who to avoid the ſin of extortion, have charged their men no more for articles thus purchaſed than the price ſtated in the tradeſmens' bills; but then they never failed to receive from the ſaid tradeſmen a pretty handſome *diſcount*, notwithſtanding they have always two months pay in their hands belonging to their Soldiers. In this caſe, an Officer always trades with the man who gives the greateſt diſcount; or if he gives none, it is only charging in his bill more than he receives, which is another name for the ſame thing. If a tradeſmen will do this, the quality of his goods is never regarded; it is a matter totally out of the queſtion; the red-coated *retailer* will take them to his company, by whom any rotten, moth-eaten rubbiſh muſt be received not only without grumbling, but with thanks. Now, whoever conſiders that the diſcount on a ſhilling is twice as much as that on ſixpence, and takes a ſtrict ſurvey of the ingenious proceſs made uſe of in extracting the ſaid diſ-

count from the pay of a poor half-ſtarved wretch, will, I hope, be ready to acknowledge, that the whole is a maſter-piece in its kind; and that it entirely exonerates the *Gentlemen* of the Army from the general charge brought againſt them; viz. that of being *ſenſeleſs, idle, hearty, honeſt fellows.*

This ſixpence then, being, in direct diſobedience to the Mutiny Act, added to the arrears, left the Soldier two ſhillings and ſixpence a week; and out of that two and ſixpence he was obliged to ſupply himſelf with bruſhes, combs, powder bag, puff, and all the nonſenſical apparatus of foppery, beſides being at perhaps eightpence or ninepence a week expence for flour, greaſe, ſoap, &c. to plaiſter his head with, when at the ſame time he was almoſt ſtarved to death.

Thus the poor fellow has, as the Secretary at War obſerved, "of late years, not had above eighteen pence "or two ſhillings a week;" but this was not for want of a *new regulation*; it was not becauſe his pay, as eſtabliſhed by law, was inſufficient; it was becauſe his ſuperior Officer was ſuffered to break the law with impunity, to anſwer the very worſt of ends: to make a Soldier a fop, to deform him, to render his perſon as much unlike any thing human as poſſible; or to draw into the pockets of the commiſſion Officers a few dirty beggarly pence To this we may attribute all the robberies committed by the Soldiery (I mean thoſe only committed by the *lower* orders of them), and the deſertions which have been the diſgrace of the Britiſh Army for ſeveral years paſt. And now when it is at laſt found out that the act of Parliament, made to guard the rights of the Soldier, has been, and is, moſt notoriouſly diſobeyed,

and

and that the poor wretch has not, and does not receive enough "for the bare purpoſe of exiſtence;" now, when it is perhaps become neceſſary to humour the abuſed Soldier a little for *ſome purpoſe* or other, what one would naturally ſuppoſe to be the only juſt and rational method of putting things to rights has never once been thought of; that is, bringing the Officers to juſtice, and enforcing obedience in future to the Mutiny Act. No; this would not do, this would affront the Officers, *the Ariſtocracy of the Army*; and, therefore, the public purſe, "the common Hack," has been again ſweated for 23,000l. per annum, by which means the Soldiers are pleaſed, and the Officers not diſpleaſed.

This is certainly the moſt curious mode of rectifying abuſes that ever was heard of; and it points out in the cleareſt light the cloſe connection that exiſts between the *ruling Faction* in this Country and the military Officers: and this connection ever muſt exiſt while we ſuffer ourſelves to be governed by *a Faction.* If any other body of men had thus impudently ſet the laws of the land at defiance, if a *gang of robbers*, unornamented with red coats and cockades, had plundered their fellow citizens, what would have been the conſequence? They would have been brought to juſtice, hanging or tranſporation would have been their fate; but, it ſeems, the Army is become a *ſanctuary* from the power of the law.—Nor ſhall we be at all ſupriſed at this, if we conſider that a ſtanding Army is the great inſtrument of oppreſſion, and that a very numerous one may in a little time be neceſſary. I am not, therefore, blaming the Miniſtry for this proceeding, I really think they have

have acted with a great deal of prudence in procuring this 23,000l. for their ſupporters; but (as it was all amongſt friends) I think the buſineſs might have been opened in a more unequivocal manner; as thus, in the language of truth:

"The ſituation of the Privates has long been ad-
"mitted to be extremely hard. It is a Law (which in
"former years was obeyed) that a Soldier ſhall receive
"three ſhillings a week for his ſubſiſtence. It has ſo
"happened, that of late years, the Officers have thought
"proper to deſpiſe this Law, and to give the Soldier
"only eighteen pence or two ſhilings. This is evidently
"too little for the bare purpoſe of exiſtence; and though
"he has ſubſiſted on it of late years, and might with our
"good will have done ſo to the day of judgment, as there
"now is a neceſſity to humour the wretch a little, *for*
"*reaſons beſt known to ourſelves*; we have by a late re-
"gulation, made his pay adequate to what he always
"ought to have enjoyed: an object that we are confident
"muſt meet the warm approbation of our majority in
"this Houſe. The public burden will, indeed, be in-
"creaſed by this, but is is certainly much better to tax
"the people to their laſt farthing than to wound *the*
"*honour* of our *truſty and well beloved*, the Officers of
"the Army, by any odious and *ungentlemanlike* inveſti-
"gation of thir conduct."

It particularly becomes you the Britiſh Soldier, to look upon this matter in its proper light. The pretended addition to your ſubſiſtence is, in fact, no addition at all; you will now receive no more than you always ought to have received. You were always allowed three ſhillings

a week

a week by the Law of the land, and you will get no more now; and therefore, you are to look upon the above-mentioned 23,000l. *per annum* as extorted from your countrymen and friends, not for your good, but to gratify the whim or the avarice of your domineering ſuperiors. I would have you obſerve here, and obſerve it well too, how partially the military Law is made to operate. If you ſhould have the fortune to become a non-commiſſioned Officer, and were to deduct but a penny from a man unlawfully, you know, the conſequence would be breaking and flogging, and refunding the money ſo deducted; but here you ſee your Officers have been guilty of the practice for years, and now it is found out, not a hair of one of their heads is touched; they are even permitted to remain in the practice, and a ſum of money is taken from the public to coax you with, now it ſeems likely that you may be wanted. You know but too well that the military Law has not of late years been ſoftened towards you; if you commit the moſt trifling offence you are flogged for it; if your gait or ſhape be not exactly according to the fancy of your driver, you are beaten with a ſtick; how comes it then that the Law is ſo ſoftened towards your Officers? Becauſe the ruiling Powers look upon your Officers as Gentlemen, and upon you as Beaſts.

Soldiers are taught to believe every thing they receive, *a gift from the Crown*; —caſt this notion from you immediately, and know, that there is not a farthing that you receive but comes out of the *Public Purſe*. What you call your *King's Bounty*, or *Queen's Bounty*, is no Bounty from either

either of them; it is twelve ſhillings and two pence a year of the public money, which no one can withold from you; it is allowed you be an Act of Parliament, while you are taught to look upon it as a preſent from the King or Queen! I feel an indignation at this I cannot deſcribe. —I would have you conſider the nature of your ſituation, I would have you know that you are not the ſervant of *one man* only; a Britiſh Soldier never can be that. You are a ſervant of the whole nation, of your countrymen, who pay you, and from whom you can have no ſeparate intereſts. I would have you look upon nothing that you receive as *Favour* or a *Bounty* from Kings, Queens, or Princes; you receive the wages of your ſervitude; it is your property, confirmed to you by Acts of the Legiſlature of your Country, which property, your rapacious Officers ought never to ſeize on, without meeting with a puniſhment due to their infamy.

FINIS.